



water flea

Daphnia spp.

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Arthropoda
Class:	Branchiopoda
Order:	Cladocera

Features

Each water flea has five or six pairs of legs, two pairs of antennae, and a single compound eye. Its body (except for the head) is enclosed in a transparent two-part shell. The shell usually ends in a spine. Water fleas are microscopic.

Natural History

Most water fleas float in the open water near the surface of ponds, lakes, and streams. A few species most often are found near the bottom. Water fleas comprise part of the zooplankton. They eat algae and bacteria that are captured through filtering. Water fleas provide a valuable food source for young fish and insect larvae. They swim using their legs and antennae, often moving toward the surface in the dark and away from the surface in the daylight. Reproduction occurs quickly in the summer months. Parthenogenesis is the most common form of reproduction. Unfertilized eggs develop in the brood pouch. All offspring are female. When conditions are bad, such as in winter, resting eggs are formed.

Resting eggs must be fertilized by a male. A water flea may live for 100 days.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.